FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR HUMAN FUNCTIONING IN ADULTHOOD – A VARIETY OF APPROACHES

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Summary. Forgiveness is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary construct studied and discussed in many sciences – philosophy, political science, sociology, anthropology and psychology. In psychology, it is understood differently by representatives of different theoretical trends. In psychoanalysis and the object relations trend, forgiveness is considered to be the effect of the psychoanalytic process, and the ability to forgive is considered a positive developmental effect (as the achievement of the ability to tolerate ambivalence towards the object and oneself and the formation of the superego). In existential psychology, forgiveness is treated as a way of healing wounds and thus giving meaning to life. The cognitive trend focuses on beliefs, thoughts and emotions that relate to the wronged person, the person causing harm and the harm. The topic of responsibility, the intention of the perpetrator and the significance of trauma in the life of the victim are also discussed. In the concept of McCollugh et al., forgiveness is defined as any prosocial changes related to the person who wrongs, and places them in the motivational sphere, not the behavioral sphere.
Keywords: forgiveness, adulthood, object relations theory, cognitive psychology

Introduction

Forgiveness is one of those phenomena that has accompanied humanity since the dawn of time, as evidenced by its discussion in literature, beginning with literary works such as Homer's *Iliad*, the plays of William Shakespeare, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, as well as its presence in the texts of all major religious and

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philosophical systems, such as the Quran, the Torah, and the Bible (Fehr et al., 2010). The topic of forgiveness was also addressed in the works of classical philosophers, such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as the treatises of Plato, Socrates, and Epicurus (Fehr et al., 2010). Some researchers (De Waal, 2000; De Waal & Pokorny, 2005; McCullough, 2008) suggest that there is evidence of forgiveness even in the cultures of our evolutionary ancestors, which highlights the universal nature of this phenomenon—not only culturally but also in some ways across species. In modern and postmodern times, forgiveness remains a relevant topic, frequently discussed in social and historical contexts, such as studies of individuals after experiencing apartheid, the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, or among Australian Aboriginal communities (Fehr et al., 2010; Tutu, 2000; Rhoades et al., 2007; Heale, 2008).

The academic discourse on forgiveness is often described as interdisciplinary (Fehr et al., 2010). In political science, researchers examine the relationship between forgiveness and social conflicts (e.g., those concerning the Middle East) and how to resolve or mitigate them (see Brooks, 1999; Cairns et al., 2005; Gibson & Gouws, 1999). Anthropologists study forgiveness from the perspective of rituals and ceremonies of particular communities, such as the Hawaiian Ho'oponopono ritual (Fehr et al., 2010; Shook, 1986). Humanists, especially philosophers, debate the definition, understanding, and moral value of forgiveness (Govier, 2002; Griswold, 2007; Murphy, 2003, 2005), while scholars of religion focus on the role of forgiveness in various religious and philosophical systems, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and ancient beliefs and religions (Dorff, 1998; Fehr et al., 2010; Griswold, 2007; Rye et al., 2000).

The aim of this paper is to answer the question: How is forgiveness understood by representatives of various theoretical perspectives, and what significance does forgiveness have for human functioning?

Forgiveness in Psychology

In psychology, the topic of forgiveness was virtually absent until the late 1980s. Researchers (McCullough et al., 2001) noted that the history of forgiveness studies in psychology can be divided into two main periods: 1) covering the years 1932–1980, and 2) from 1980 to the present. The first period was unsystematic, with many fragmented studies addressing forgiveness. From the 1980s onward, more systematic and intensive research on forgiveness began (McCullough et al., 2001).

Initially, forgiveness was considered solely as a philosophical and theological construct. Over time, however, the significance of experiences related to feelings of harm and guilt, particularly in the context of psychotherapy, became apparent.

Forgiveness is understood as a multidimensional construct, encompassing philosophical, theological, cultural, and psychological aspects (Brudek & Steuden, 2005). The primary question posed by psychologists was, "When do people forgive?"—a question that has long posed difficulties and, although less so now, still remains somewhat controversial (Fehr et al., 2010).

The phenomenon of moral judgment made by children in Jean Piaget's theory (1965) can, according to Ryan Fehr and colleagues (2010), be understood as one of the first mentions of forgiveness in psychology, even though forgiveness was not a direct focus of Piaget's work. In 1945, efforts were made to describe the emotional structure of the interpersonal ability of forgiveness (Litwiński, 1945). In the 1950s, the issue of forgiveness was of particular interest to pastoral counselors and mental health specialists. They sought to understand how forgiveness could aid in restoring healthy psychological functioning (McCullough et al., 2001).

The pioneers of forgiveness research in psychology include Robert Enright, Frank Fincham, Michael McCullough, and Everett Worthington (Fehr et al., 2010). Clinicians focused primarily on the relationship between forgiveness and patient well-being (Enright, 2001; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Freedman et al., 2005; Wade et al., 2005; Worthington et al., 2000). Developmental psychologists conducted research on changes in forgiveness ability across all stages of development, from childhood through adolescence and adulthood, to old age (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Hebl & Enright, 1993; Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1994; Allemand, 2008). Personality psychologists explored the relationship between specific personality traits and forgiveness (Berry et al., 2001; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; Exline et al., 2004). Forgiveness was also studied in the broader context of social mechanisms and in the perspective of family life (Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham et al., 2002; Hoyt et al., 2005).

At present, there are numerous conceptualizations of forgiveness, some of which are outlined below.

Concepts of Forgiveness
in Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Perspectives

In psychoanalytic and psychodynamic literature, the concept of forgiveness was largely absent until the early 21st century (Macaskill, 2004). This can be attributed to the emphasis placed on studying constructs related to the unconscious, while forgiveness was trivialized, traditionally associated with consciousness and objective reality, similar to shame, which only later came to be recognized as an emotion underlying narcissism (Siassi, 2007). Sigmund Freud never referred to this term in his publications (Akhtar, 2002), as he did not consider it a value-neutral therapeutic goal (Ofer, 2016). For many years, forgiveness theories were considered "phantom" due to the unclear conceptualization of the construct and problematic ties to Judeo-Christian religion (Frommer, 2018). It was believed that forgiveness could result from defense mechanisms such as reaction formation and the suppression of anger, and could be a symptom of various forms of masochism (Smith, 2008). Over time, it became clear that forgiveness is not only intrapsychic but also relational, and that it holds an important place in the psychoanalytic process. This shift was largely due to the development of psychoanalytic theories over the past two decades, particularly in

the American branch – object relations theory. Forgiveness began to be linked with early stages of development and was situated within the formation of the superego and higher forms of moral idealization (Ofer, 2016).

Salmon Akhtar (2002) defined forgiveness as a complex emotion that encompasses both conscious and unconscious aspects. This led to attention being drawn to other related terms (Siassi, 2007): complaint (Weintrobe, 2004), reconciliation (Nedelman, 2005), and vengeance (Rosen, 2007). These issues remain controversial and, according to Shahrzad Siassi (2007), push the boundaries of contemporary psychoanalysis, situating it at the intersection of metapsychology and scientific intersubjectivity. Today, in the psychodynamic and psychoanalytic traditions, forgiveness is gaining greater prominence. Forgiveness, in this view, is defined as a willingness to respond to harm experienced in an interpersonal relationship by regulating aggressive drives related to seeking revenge and avoiding the perpetrator, as well as through prosocial responses toward them (Exline et al., 2008).

Many theorists also associate the ability to forgive with the skill of resolving conflicts related to the ideal and real images of the self and objects (Karen, 2001; Akhtar, 2002; Mitchell, 2002; Kernberg, 2012). Psychoanalysts and representatives of the psychodynamic approach emphasized the difficulty and ambivalence in granting the perpetrator forgiveness. They also recognized that forgiveness can serve various functions. The primary function is often the restoration of the relationship with a loved (or once-loved) but lost object, as well as the healing of damaged and dissociated parts of the psyche. However, certain forms or characteristics of forgiveness correspond to disordered personalities – masochistic or self-destructive individuals – where the perpetrator is seen as a victim, making forgiveness superficial and false (Akhtar, 2002).

Melanie Klein (1935) also emphasized the difference between genuine and pathological forgiveness, linking the former to love and respect for the object, which leads to a more holistic perception of objects (the depressive position). Following Klein's thought, Otto Kernberg also distinguished true forgiveness from false forgiveness. Kernberg (1995) understood true forgiveness as the expression of a mature superego capable of recognizing not only ambivalence but also aggression toward the object. In Jessica Benjamin's (2004) view, forgiveness is the release from rigid patterns of victim and perpetrator, resulting in a dialogue based on symmetry and a sense of identity. Forgiveness can also be viewed as a two-step process (Ofer, 2016), the first step being intrapsychic repair, and the second – the perpetrator's acknowledgment of the harm caused. The first step involves experiencing and processing a broad spectrum of emotions. It also requires reworking the image of the perpetrator – integrating the representation of the object as both harmful and possessing positive qualities, recognizing its weaknesses and contradictions. This involves overcoming certain defense mechanisms – maintaining split representations of the object and projecting dissociated aggression onto the good part of the object. The result of forgiveness is a more realistic image of the perpetrator. The second step should involve real contact,

but if this is not possible, substitute forgiveness can occur, worked through in psychoanalytic therapy through various forms of transference (Ofer, 2016).

Henry Smith (2008) negated the importance of forgiveness in psychoanalytic theory, considering it culturally idealized and merely a "byproduct" of the analytic process. He argued that forgiveness could be expressed as the ability to tolerate unpleasant affective states, the skill of dealing with losses, and the abandonment of grievances and complaints directed toward significant objects, such as parental figures, as well as the acceptance of reality as it is (Smith, 2008). In this understanding, forgiveness is not seen as a process but rather the result of an interpsychic process. He suggested that it is a combination of dynamic mechanisms, such as the transformation of reactive formations, reparation through internalized objects, or the transformation of internalized objects (Frommer, 2018). In Smith's view, the construct of forgiveness is superficial, referring only to conscious acts and experiences related to interpersonal relationships. Additionally, he emphasized the lack of dynamic processes unique to forgiveness. He noted that it is easy to label intrapsychic phenomena as forgiveness, which actually serve entirely different functions and may be expressions of defense mechanisms. However, Smith's perspective seems to overlook the relational nature of forgiveness, which was emphasized in the works of Martin Stephan Frommer (2018) and Siassi (2007). Siassi argued that forgiveness, while similar to acts of reconciliation and acceptance, is a broader concept because it also includes, unlike acceptance, the restoration of an internal relationship with the hostile object, while reconciliation was viewed as a conscious human activity. In Siassi's view, forgiveness is similar to the process of mourning.

Frommer (2018) argued that the typical description of forgiveness, which focuses on it as an individual experience, is flawed. Forgiveness does not happen within a person but between people. Viewing forgiveness from this perspective allows for a clearer conceptualization – not only within psychoanalytic theory but also psychology as a whole. In Frommer's (2018) view, forgiveness is an intersubjective, bidirectional process that occurs between people and their minds. Akhtar (2018), following Webster, identified two phenomena that must occur for forgiveness to take place: 1) dealing with felt anger, and 2) changing one's response to the perpetrator. Forgiveness is thus not only an intrapsychic change in emotional experience but also a form of intrapsychic action, enabling the release from difficult emotions related to the injury and letting go of the perpetrator, who may also be freed from the emotional burden of the harm committed. In this view, forgiveness is not merely a tool for renewing relationships between people; sometimes, it allows for the recovery of one's sense of freedom (Frommer, 2018). In this framework, a necessary condition for forgiveness is the introduction of a leavening agent – an element capable of changing and reevaluating the traumatic experiences. The most important element of this agent, mentioned by authors (Akhtar, 2002; Frommer, 2018), is time, which allows for a distanced view of past events, changes in perception, and the mitigation of unpleasant affective states. It may also promote reflection by the injured party on themselves

and their situation. An important aspect of forgiveness is also the recognition by the perpetrator of the change that has occurred in the victim, not their feelings of remorse or guilt. Reflecting on what has changed in the person as a result of traumatic experiences is, paradoxically, one of the essential elements for liberation from them (Frommer, 2018). Akhtar (2002) suggested that the recognition of change by others is also a way of qualitatively transforming experiences and situating them not only in the real but also in the imagined realm. A lack of forgiveness, according to Akhtar, is accompanied by psychological rigidity and rumination.

Martin Buber (1970) argued that forgiveness is a phenomenon that equally concerns both the one who causes harm and the one who is harmed. He believed that forgiveness places them in mutual dependence, leading to the recovery of humanity for both parties. Full acknowledgment by the harm-doer that their actions have changed the harmed person allows access to the part of the self that was altered during the injury. This act is described by authors as the greatest transforming factor, which can lead to the release of both parties (Buber, 1970). The authors also emphasize that acknowledging guilt is more than just an apology. The remorse of the harm-doer is a mixture of many emotions: regret, shame, sadness, guilt, but also a state similar to mentalization – the awareness of being the cause of someone's suffering and the ability to identify with their emotions (Frommer, 2018). Remorse is thus an essential element for the harmed and the harm-doer to regain their sense of humanity. At the same time, Frommer (2018) reflected in his article on the situation of the one asking for forgiveness. He emphasized that this situation requires the harm-doer to confront their own aggressive part, as well as the uncertainty about the emotional response of the forgiving party. It is also connected to the strong emotions and the desire for the injured party to acknowledge the suffering of the harm-doer. Frommer (2018) adopts a strongly humanistic perspective, arguing that forgiveness is an act of both liberation and the integration of two opposing images of the harm-doer – both as one who causes suffering and as one who suffers. Simultaneously, a relational view of forgiveness allows for moving beyond the traditional division of reality into good and evil, striving for integration, and tolerating ambivalence while engaging with representations of bad objects, which, through the continuous process of mutual recognition, allow for a holistic view of the object and the recovery of the ability to experience ambivalent feelings toward others (Frommer, 2018). Such an understanding of forgiveness situates the capacity for it in individuals who have overcome the paranoid-schizoid phase according to Klein (1957) and reached the depressive phase (Frommer, 2018).

Explaining the origins of the ability to forgive, psychoanalysts refer to early childhood experiences in relationships with parents (Siassi, 2007). According to Siassi, every person holds a primary, narcissistic belief that they will be loved by their parents and, to a lesser extent, other close individuals. The child's belief in being loved is dependent on the belief in the love of the father and mother. Based on this assumption, the deprivation of the need for love from caregivers can lead to a disruption of narcissistic equilibrium, as the child feels stripped of their natural

right. The degree of narcissistic injury is determined by the expectations of love that the child places in the parents. In this case, the resulting relational void or insecure attachment pattern appears intolerable, which, in turn, is associated with the desire to repair the relationship. To reverse the feeling of being stripped of parental love, the child develops the ability to forgive, even if their expectations were unrealistic or impossible to meet by significant others (Siassi, 2007).

Referring to contemporary psychodynamic theories, the concept of false forgiveness (Akhtar, 2002; Kernberg, 1995) seems worth mentioning. In psychodynamic terms, true forgiveness is distinguished from false (pseudo-forgiveness), which most often reflects personality psychopathology (Vitz & Mango, 1997). Forgiveness may serve psychopathology, being significantly distorted by the individual's conscious or unconscious motivational processes. Several types of patterns associated with false forgiveness are listed:

1. Narcissistic superiority – where forgiveness is granted by someone who feels morally superior;
2. Denial – where the person granting forgiveness does not confront their own negative emotions toward the perpetrator;
3. Reaction formation – the imposition of positive attitudes and emotions that suppress the true, negative emotions and attitudes toward the harm-doer;
4. Nullification – the forgiving person tries to negate the occurrence of the injury through forgiveness; in this way, forgiveness loses its relational character and becomes an act of illusory liberation from the harm experienced;
5. Neurotic dependence – a person with a neurotic personality structure grants false forgiveness to maintain a pathological, masochistic relationship, typically reflecting a very negative self-concept;
6. Symbiosis – an individual who has not developed stable representations of self and objects grants forgiveness out of a deep fear of abandonment by close individuals;
7. Manipulative control – where a person feigns forgiveness to force the perpetrator to admit guilt or hide their own guilt by coercing others to admit their wrongdoing (Vitz & Mango, 1997).

Forgiveness in the Existential Approach

It may seem surprising that there is relatively little source material on the issue of forgiveness from representatives of the existential approach. McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2001) explain this absence by pointing to broader phenomena present in psychology until the 1980s. It should also be noted that the construct of forgiveness was long absent, not only in the social sciences but in science as a whole (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2001). Researchers also indicated that forgiveness was traditionally attributed to religion rather than psychology. Additionally, social scientists were reluctant to address topics traditionally associated with religion

(Gorsuch, 1998; as cited in McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2001). There was also the historical context – the 20th century was the most merciless in human history, which may have intensified the impression that forgiveness was a trivial emotion.

In the existential approach, forgiveness was addressed to a limited extent by Viktor Frankl (1962), who believed that it could contribute to giving life meaning. In Frankl's view (2004), forgiveness is an attitude that makes it possible to achieve self-transcendence. This means that a person turns towards something or someone beyond themselves, either to reciprocate love for another person or to achieve personal satisfaction. Forgiveness allows the realization of one's inner potential.

Forgiveness has the capacity to heal – even significant past injuries (Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2010). This occurs through fostering a more expansive and transcendent point of view, the ability to broaden the perspective on harm, and through the development of emotional and cognitive problem-solving, all of which help give life meaning (Frankl, 1962). In this conception, forgiveness is associated with attributing meaning to injuries, aiming to mitigate their traumatic effects (Toussaint et al., 2017).

Forgiveness in the Cognitive Approach

Currently, forgiveness is most extensively discussed among cognitive scientists. Reflections on forgiveness have led to several basic conclusions. Researchers agree that forgiveness does not necessarily involve reconciliation with the perpetrator, nor does it require forgetting, approval, or justification of the harm caused by the offender. It is also not synonymous with reconciliation, trust, or absolving the offender from consequences. Instead, it is understood as an intrapsychic experience, the distinctive feature of which is the release of negative emotions toward the offender and the abandonment of revenge (Exline et al., 2004). Researchers debated whether the mere absence of negative emotions toward the perpetrator could be considered forgiveness or whether it also required the cultivation of positive feelings (see McCullough et al., 1998; Worthington & Wade, 1999; Wade & Worthington, 2003). These debates led to the hypothesis that forgiveness has a two-dimensional structure – positive and negative.

For a long time, there was no clear answer to what forgiveness entails in light of science, as many of its aspects sparked controversy, especially in terms of its definition. Today, most of these disputes have been resolved, and forgiveness is conceptualized as an intrapsychic experience associated with a conscious act of releasing negative feelings, intentions, and thoughts toward the offender (McCullough et al., 1998; Worthington & Wade, 1999; Wade & Worthington, 2003). Despite many similarities, representatives of different concepts (all within the cognitive approach) still conceptualize forgiveness in slightly different ways (Mróz & Kaleta, 2016; Sells & Hargrave, 1998; Worthington et al., 2007). Below, the most important concepts of forgiveness from the perspective of this discussion are presented.

In cognitive theories, researchers focus on beliefs and thoughts centered on the offender, the victim, and the harm experienced, as well as on the responsibility,

intentions of the offender, and the meaning of the harm in the victim's life (Kaleta et al., 2016). Representatives of the cognitive approach include Beverly Flanigan (1992), Kristina C. Gordon, Fred Luskin, Michael McCullough (2000), Laura Yamhure Thomson, and colleagues (2005).

Flanigan (1992) proposed a five-stage model of forgiveness, which ultimately leads to the release of hatred and the desire for revenge against the offender. Flanigan believed that forgiveness is possible when the individual is ready to confront their suffering and accept themselves as changed by the harm experienced; it is also a difficult choice for the person forgiving. The first phase of forgiveness involves naming the harm and giving it significance in a broader context that includes the individual's life. The second phase involves relinquishing the sense of victimization, while the third assigns blame to the offender, initiating the "balancing of scales," which constitutes the fourth phase. The balancing of scales refers to becoming aware of the existential costs of both remaining in a state of victimization and granting forgiveness. The fifth stage is the release of guilt, which enables further development. In Flanigan's view (1992), forgiveness can be interpersonal—relating to harm caused by another person – or personal, in terms of forgiving oneself. Self-forgiveness involves the readiness to let go of negative emotions and adopt a more compassionate attitude toward oneself.

McCullough (2001) conceptualized forgiveness as a complex response of the harmed individual to the perpetrator of a specific offense. He understood the absence of forgiveness as the intensification of avoidant tendencies or the pursuit of revenge against the offender, along with the rejection of a more benevolent attitude toward them. In McCullough's and colleagues' (2001) framework, forgiveness is not seen as a type of motivation in and of itself but rather as a set of prosocial changes related to the offender. Linking forgiveness with motivation rather than observable behavior stemmed from the belief that one could forgive but still not engage in new or benevolent actions toward those who caused the harm.

Thomson and colleagues proposed a new perspective on the concept of transgression, which in the context of forgiveness research refers to harm, injury, or the crossing of physical and psychological boundaries, resulting in suffering. Transgression encompasses events that are inconsistent with the victim's perception, expectation, and belief about what the world and people should be like. The experience of injury often triggers negative thoughts ("This ruined my life"), emotions such as anger, and behaviors related to the desire for revenge. Responses to injury involve a constellation of affective, cognitive, and behavioral factors. In Polish literature, transgression has a positive dimension, referring to transcending one's limits and abilities (Kozielecki, 1987). Given this difference in meaning, the Polish literature uses terms such as offense, harm, injury, or wound (Kaleta, Mróz, & Guzewicz, 2016). According to Thomson, forgiveness is the acknowledgment that harm has occurred, but it also involves working to ensure that affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses to the offender and the harm lose their negative significance. However, forgiveness does not

equate to approval of the offender, acceptance of the act, or consent to the injury. It is a dialectical process in which the individual synthesizes and reframes their previous assumptions, giving new meaning to the act, the offender, and themselves as the victim. Carl E. Thoresen (2001) referred to this stage as constructing a new narrative about the injury, the offender, and the injured party by shedding new light on the original implications of the situation and seeing the offender in a more complex way (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000). Forgiveness is a necessary step toward reconciliation, which involves restoring the relationship with the offender (Fow, 1996).

Reframing the meaning of harm also changes the response—both the strength and value of the response matter. Value refers to whether the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors are neutral, negative, or positive. Strength refers to the intensity of thoughts, emotions, and behavior, which are influenced by the victim's perception of the harm. The forgiving person can change their negative response through two basic actions: a) changing the value from negative through neutral to positive, or b) changing both the value and strength of the response. These actions are termed "reality negotiations" (Higgins & Leibowitz, 2002; Thomson et al., 2005), which involve altering the value of the harm to align more closely with the individual's positive self-image. Changing the valence of the response from negative to at least neutral is, according to Thomson (Thomson et al., 2005), the fundamental and sufficient criterion for forgiveness. Forgiveness may also be accompanied by affective change and increased benevolence and positive emotions toward the offender. This approach distinguishes Thomson and colleagues from researchers who believed that compassion and empathy for the offender are essential elements of the forgiveness process. In this approach, reconciliation is not synonymous with forgiveness, nor is it a condition for granting it. Importantly, changing the strength of the response is not necessary for forgiveness. It is merely a factor that facilitates the forgiveness process – the victim ceases to perceive themselves in the context of the harm, the psychological association with the offender weakens, and there is a decreased engagement in thoughts about the injury, especially over time.

Thomson's (2005) forgiveness model also includes the concept of "situation" as a potential harm, distinguishing it from other theories. A situation may be experienced as an injury (and thus the object of forgiveness) if it violates a person's positive beliefs and results in a negative behavioral, affective, and cognitive response. An example of such a situation could be a serious illness that breaks previous assumptions such as "bad things don't happen to good people" or "I am a picture of health," leading to a negative response. Thomson's (2005) approach stands in clear opposition to that of Robert Enright and Anne L. Zell (1989), who claimed that one can only forgive another person. In their view, one can cope with a situation but not forgive it.

In light of this theory, the issue of forgiving God seems problematic. Exline, Yali, and Lobel (1999) argued that forgiving God, even after forgiving oneself or another person, is associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Forgiveness of God may be a specific form of forgiving a "situation," depending on the worldview of

the person granting forgiveness. In a situation where believers may blame God for the harm they have experienced, others may blame fate, the world, life, or destiny. Forgiveness of God is closer to forgiveness of another person, based on the assumption of their awareness in harming the individual, which cannot be assumed with regard to fate or any situation – since these lack subjectivity (Thomson et al., 2005). However, the issue of forgiveness is more complex –people often forgive others assuming that their harmful action lacked intent, or forgiveness may not be directed at just one person. This may occur, for example, in the case of illness. A person may blame God or a situation, but also themselves (e.g., by assuming they did not take sufficient care of their health), or even their parents for passing on certain genetic predispositions that manifested due to unfavorable factors.

In this understanding of forgiveness, it is essential to distinguish between situational (episodic) and dispositional forgiveness.

Dispositional forgiveness is considered a personality trait. It is viewed as a relatively stable tendency to forgive various harms and injuries in different situational contexts (Paleari et al., 2009). Dispositional forgiveness is believed to be amenable to therapeutic intervention and can develop over the course of life (Kaleta et al., 2016). Conceptualized this way, forgiveness can be understood as a dimension ranging from completely unforgiving to very forgiving of others. According to McCullough, people typically fall somewhere in the middle of this continuum. The ability to forgive others can be multifaceted. Forgiveness is sometimes seen as somewhat analogous to intimacy, commitment, and trust, and as characteristic of certain types of social structures, such as in some families, intimate relationships, marriages, or communities. Dispositional forgiveness is also linked to many personality traits, such as empathy and agreeableness (McCullough, 2001). It has also been shown that older adults forgive more easily (Enright et al., 1989; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Park & Enright, 1997). Forgiveness has also been found to develop in accordance with Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning (1976). It was believed that at the earliest stages of the development of the disposition to forgive, it is only possible after an act of revenge or when the offender has made restitution (McCullough & Witvliet, 2001). The second type of forgiveness—episodic forgiveness – is related to forgiving a specific harm experienced during life, whether it be a person, situation, or God (Kaleta et al., 2016).

To date, relatively few studies have been conducted on the relationships between forgiveness and functioning in adulthood. However, it has been demonstrated that there is a connection between both mental and physical health and the capacity to forgive (Berry & Worthington, 2001; McCullough et al., 2000; Worthington, 2007).

Forgiveness and Selected Aspects of Functioning in Adulthood

Dispositional forgiveness is associated with mental health, life satisfaction, and functioning in intimate relationships, such as satisfaction (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004), commitment, and intimacy (McCullough et al., 1998). Episodic forgiveness has

been found to be linked with functioning after traumatic events. Individuals who forgave their offender exhibited lower levels of PTSD symptoms than those who did not forgive (Mróz & Kaleta, 2016; Worthington et al., 2007). Other studies emphasized that both dispositional and episodic forgiveness have multifaceted relationships with PTSD symptoms. Orcutt and colleagues (2005) found a negative relationship between PTSD symptoms and episodic forgiveness. In a 2008 study (Orcutt et al., 2008), they further demonstrated that the greater the harm, the lower the tendency to forgive and the higher the intensity of PTSD symptoms among the victims. It was also confirmed that the relationship between PTSD symptom severity and episodic forgiveness is moderated by the type of traumatic experience. PTSD symptoms and forgiveness were negatively correlated with car accidents, witnessing domestic violence, physical abuse, and being a victim of childhood sexual abuse. Additionally, individuals who were sexually abused and considered it the most traumatic experience of their lives exhibited a minimal connection between PTSD symptoms and forgiveness (Orcutt, 2005, 2008).

It was also shown that individuals with a higher tendency to forgive reported a greater sense of social support and were less likely to use alcohol to cope with problems (Webb et al., 2011).

Research results confirm that forgiveness is related to functioning in close relationships (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Braithwaite, 2011; Haversath et al., 2019; Novak et al., 2017). Dispositional forgiveness (along with anger as a personality trait) was found to predict the quality of intimate relationships, especially love, affection, and happiness (Berry & Worthington, 2001). Forgiving a partner is associated with better functioning in intimate relationships and improved mental health (Haversath et al., 2019). Studies indicate that alongside commitment, the ability to forgive is one of the strongest predictors of high-quality romantic relationships (Fincham et al., 2007). Results show that forgiveness and commitment are linked to more positive relationship behaviors, such as fidelity, sacrifice for the relationship, and conflict resolution (Braithwaite et al., 2011; Brandeau-Brown & Ragsdale, 2008; Fincham et al., 2004, 2007). Moreover, individuals with a greater capacity for forgiveness also demonstrated better relationship self-regulation, which helped them improve relationship quality and avoid destructive behaviors such as verbal and physical violence. More forgiving partners also showed a decreasing tendency over time to seek revenge, avoid, or harbor resentment (Braithwaite, 2011), as well as an increasing sense of respect for the other person. It has been shown that the ability to forgive is one of the elements that enables healthy development at every stage of life (Flanigan, 1992).

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PRZEBACZENIE W PSYCHOLOGII I JEGO ZNACZENIE
DLA FUNKCJONOWANIA CZŁOWIEKA W OKRESIE DOROSŁOŚCI –
BOGACTWO PODEJŚĆ

Streszczenie. Przebaczenie jest wielowymiarowym i interdyscyplinarnym konstruktem badanym i omawianym w wielu naukach – filozofii, politologii, socjologii, antropologii i psychologii. W psychologii jest ono różnie pojmowane przez

przedstawicieli różnych nurtów teoretycznych. W psychoanalizie i nurcie relacji z obiektem przebaczenie jest uważane za efekt procesu psychoanalitycznego, a zdolność do przebaczania za pozytywny efekt rozwojowy (jako osiągnięcie zdolności tolerowania ambiwalencji wobec obiektu i siebie oraz ukształtowanie superego). W psychologii egzystencjalnej przebaczenie jest traktowane jako sposób leczenia ran i w ten sposób nadawania sensu życiu. Nurt poznawczy koncentruje się na przekonaniach, myślach i emocjach, które odnoszą się do osoby skrzywdzonej, osoby wyrządzającej krzywdę i krzywdzie. Omawiany jest również temat odpowiedzialności, intencji sprawcy i znaczenia traumy w życiu ofiary. W koncepcji McCollugh i współpracowników przebaczenie jest definiowane jako wszelkie prospołeczne zmiany związane z osobą, która krzywdzi, co sytuuje je ze sferze motywacyjnej, a nie behawioralnej.

Słowa kluczowe: przebaczenie, dorosłość, teoria relacji z obiektem, psychologia poznawcza